

How the Bible became the Bible

Exploring how the Bible came to be and why a
literal interpretation of it may be dangerous.
This exploration can open a door to your
continued spiritual growth.

Donald L. O'Dell

Florida Writers Association Royal Palm
Literary Award for Non-Fiction

2nd Edition

New Material and a New Preface

Table of Contents

Preface to the 2nd Edition

Introduction

PART 1 - The Development of the Old Testament

CHAPTER 1 - The Sources of the Old Testament

CHAPTER 2 - From the Patriarchs to the Kings

CHAPTER 3 - The Schism and Beyond

CHAPTER 4 - Primary Authors of the Old Testament

CHAPTER 5 - Old Testament Themes to Remember

PART 2 - The Development of the New Testament

CHAPTER 6 - The Time of Jesus (4 B.C.E.–30 C.E.)

CHAPTER 7 - Part 1: The “Missing Years” (30-70 C.E.)

From Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith

CHAPTER 8 - Part 2: The “Missing Years” (30-70 C.E.)

From Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith

CHAPTER 9 - The Difficulty in “Finding the Right Words

CHAPTER 10 - From the Christ of Faith to the Christ of

Theological Doctrine (70–400 c.e.)

CHAPTER 11 - Formalizing the Doctrine and Finalizing the

New Testament

CHAPTER 12 - New Testament Themes to Remember

Afterword

Appendixes

APPENDIX A - Historical Overview of the Bible

APPENDIX B - The Words of Jesus

APPENDIX C - The Nicene Creed

APPENDIX D - The Eloquence of Fundamental Literalism

APPENDIX E - A Course in Miracles

Bibliography

Index

Preface to the 2nd Edition

These have become very disturbing and confusing times for me. What I hear on the news or read in letters to editors doesn't sound like the America I thought I knew. People are no longer agreeing or disagreeing about issues. It has all gotten very, very personal.

I witness outright hateful speech and actions – whether it is in a commentary on TV, or from the White House, or in a grocery store or restaurant. I had a customer accost me in a restaurant telling me, after overhearing some of my conversation, saying his preacher said, “If you are not a Republican, you cannot go to Heaven.” I also hear folks stating, “I wish all religions and preachers and sermons would just dry up and blow away. They are not helpful anymore. They are causing much, much more harm than good.”

For those of us trying to remain true to the Spirit of the Christ, all this can be very confusing and can be very discouraging. At least it can be for me. Maybe it is for you, too.

I hear and see those of a very conservative disposition using the Bible to justify truly unbiblical concepts and actions – most recently hearing federal officials quote a single out-of-context verse from the Book of Romans to justify separating immigrant children from their parents. I see and hear very spiritual people who no longer listen to news or even

bother to vote. A few have told me, “Earthly matters don’t matter to me anymore.” I see and hear progressive/liberal people being repelled by all things religious since, to them, all religions lately seem to be “out of control.” That attitude quite often may cut them off from experiencing anything spiritual and uplifting.

You may be asking: **“What does all this have to do with the Bible?”** All of these reactions are, in my opinion, of people whose spiritual foundations have been shaken and who are struggling to find some solid footing. But: It does seem odd watching the Taliban in Afghanistan, following a strict male-dominant interpretation of the Quran, taking Islam to the brink; or watching Zionistic Jews express the view that “the only good Palestinian is one who is no longer living here;” or watching fundamentalist Christians and a lot of evangelicals hating, despising, and condemning virtually anyone who disagrees with them or their political views – and doing so in the name of the Prince of Peace, the God of Love, and the purity of the Holy Bible.

I need to remember, for those who consider themselves to be spiritual, many base their spirituality on some form of personal transformative experience. Many who consider themselves to be very religious seem to be basing their religiousness on believing in someone else’s spiritual experience – primarily those personalities in the Bible.

People seemed to find my initial book a useful guide in navigating misunderstandings in and the conflicting emotions of contemporary Christian responses to the

events of the day. It is my hope that this 2nd Edition, along with this new Preface, will offer you a path to finding calm and centeredness in today's seemingly unending cascade of turbulent news.

In many ways what is happening in society today – fast-paced, multi-level political and social events happening all day long every day – reminds me of the late 1960s through the early 70s when I was a young graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, working as a Street Minister in the inner city of Trenton, NJ, and when the world was torn between the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War protestors, and the rise of Women's Liberation. Sometimes they all seemed to merge, only to separate and re-group. The response of the "religious community" to all of this was to hunker down and declare anything significantly different from what they were used to as "unholy or unbiblical or sinful." They used the Bible any way they could to harm the movement de jour. If bra-burning or female sexual freedom were today's headline, then sermons would be about the submissiveness of women and the holy sanctity of sex. If a burning of a black church or a non-violent march confronting "official," but violent, suppression was the headline, then sermons would be about the uncivility of African-Americans and the duty to abide by legal precedent and reverence for legal authorities. If the headlines were about the Vietnam War, then sermons would be about how the USA was God's gift to the world and, as Christians, we were to support that. Sermons also were preached, regardless of which simultaneous movement prompted it,

to communicate the wisdom of the most popular bumper sticker of the day: “America – Love it or Leave it!”

It was a confusing and discouraging time then, too. But we came through it. We will come through this as well.

Again, you ask: **“What does all this have to do with the Bible?”** All this has to do with bibliolatry. Bibliolatry is an unhealthy “worship” of the Bible. This generally includes a belief that each word – primarily in the King James Version – must be taken literally. It has to do with incomprehension of what the Bible is not. It has to do with your believing every word in the Bible in order to make sure God smiles on you.

Understanding How the Bible became the Bible has to do with trying to see the personalities in the Bible as real people – as real as your next-door neighbors. When you are able to see a little bit of yourself in biblical characters, you will also begin to see a little of them in you. Opening that little window of understanding, depending on your willingness to change your thinking, will allow a small breeze of spirituality and human Oneness into your very being. Welcoming that little breeze is the key to your ability to begin the journey to finding peace, joy, and acceptance in today’s world of turmoil.

This is why I am reissuing my book with this Preface as well as a few textual modifications.

But, first, to make this all make sense, I need to tell you about spiritual truths (not religious dogma) that I have

experienced as a grateful member of Alcoholics Anonymous and a student of A Course In Miracles. These experiences transformed my life. This is important because we need to comprehend the difference between the world of Form and the world of Content or Meaning. I also need to say that my descriptions of my interactions with my sponsor and AA old-timers are of my own experience. I do not speak for AA. The “official” voice of AA is the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, New York City.

I know I am to be **IN** this world but not **OF** this world. But how do I do that when being bombarded by news stories – every day – that boggle my mind? How do I control myself so I respond rather than react? How do I balance my understanding of human Oneness and, at the same time, watch people do terribly disturbing things to other people? **IN** the world but not **OF** the world. Simple. Not easy. It is a delicate, confusing dance we are asked to perform – dance lessons with no painted footprints on the floor to guide us. I offer my version of how to dance that dance later in this Preface.

As I wrote the original text, I included my personal experiences and revelations in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) because what I had witnessed was similar to the experiences of embryonic pre-New-Testament Christians during the forty years following the crucifixion of Jesus. (I discuss this in Chapter Nine). But I was unaware of the content of A Course In Miracles (ACIM). As I began my ACIM studies in 2009 (continuing to the present), I was awed by

the similarity between the spiritual truths of ACIM and the practical guidance of AA. They seemed to me to be the same language. ACIM focused on the Truth of humankind's existence and the importance of willingness to make fuller contact with the spiritual dimension of True Reality. In order to follow AA's suggested program of recovery, the focus was on practical, simple guidance in day-to-day life. I would eventually have a spiritual experience in AA, while learning how to live a life as a mature responsible adult for the first time.

Let me give you a few examples....